

Malachi 1:1-14

Malachi, the Last of the Old Testament Prophets

The Book of Malachi is the last book in the Old Testament. One rabbinical tradition is that Malachi, which means "Messenger" or "His Messenger," was actually written by Ezra. Others say it was Mordecai. Although his identity and background are not given, there is no reason to assume that he wasn't a person named Malachi who was given several prophecies from God to deliver.

The Talmud teaches, "After the last prophets Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi died, the Divine Spirit of prophetic revelation departed from the Jewish people." (Yoma 9b. Sotah 48b. Tosefta ibid, 13:4; Sanhedrin 11:1)

The Spirit had already departed from the Holy of Holies in Solomon's Temple before its destruction. Now the Spirit departed from the Jewish people entirely, awaiting the coming of Messiah.

The Gemara explains that idolatry was not the problem for Israel in the Second Temple times. That Temple, destroyed by the Romans, was condemned because of "groundless hate"

"But at the time of the destruction of the Second Temple the evil inclination did not have that much strength, for the people occupied themselves in Torah and service. It was only through plots and schemes that hatred was planted among them. For this is the way of the evil inclination when it wishes to cause the righteous to stumble; it causes them to err as if they were doing a mitzva by hating and pursuing each man his fellow, and through this there was groundless hate. This is the matter of the fox which is a metaphor for a scheming man..." (Arukh le-Ner, Makkot 24b)

Jesus was the target of such hatred, schemes and plots:

- John 11:53 - "...So from that day on they plotted to take his life."

Why did God remove the Spirit, when the Temple had just been rebuilt and a remnant of the Jews were back in their own land?

The zeal that had energized those returnees apparently evaporated after the Temple was completed.

Malachi ministered around the same time period when Ezra and Nehemiah were dealing with a corrupt priesthood, led by the High Priest Eliashib. He had cut off the tithes that were supposed to go to the Levites, instead funneling those funds to his partner in graft Tobiah the Ammonite.

One of the grandsons of Eliashib had married a daughter of Sanballat, the governor of neighboring Samaria and a chief enemy of Nehemiah's rebuilding of the city walls.

Israel's most important institution was rotten from the inside.

Consequently, Malachi details God's complaints against the priesthood.

We read Malachi 2 last week where the prophet condemns the people for marrying idol worshippers from the surrounding peoples.

Malachi 3 is often used as encouragement to tithe, with a warning not to "rob God" and with the promise that if the tithes were properly given God would "open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." (**Malachi 3:10**)

This is true, of course, but it makes even more sense if we know that there was an almost "organized crime" type ring that was actually "robbing God" inside the Temple and depriving the Levites of their livelihood (see Nehemiah 13:4-5).

Jacob Have I Loved, Esau Have I Hated

The first thing God tells the people in the first chapter of Malachi is that He loves them. Specifically God chose Jacob - which includes all the people as the descendants of Jacob/Israel. He still had chosen them as the venue or entryway of the Messiah Jesus to enter the world. All they needed to do was repent.

Malachi 1:1-3 - "The burden of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi. I have loved you, saith the LORD. Yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us? Was not Esau Jacob's brother? saith the LORD: yet I loved Jacob, And I hated Esau, and laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness."

The idea is less a "love - hate" emotional feeling as we would interpret it, and is probably more like "chosen vs not chosen" or "accepter vs rejected."

Jacob and Esau were twins, who wrestled in their mother's womb, with Esau born first while Jacob came out holding on to his brother's heel (**Genesis 25**).

Paul explains that choosing Jacob rather than Esau before they were born was not related to anything they had done, good or bad. It was God's decision.

- **Romans 9:11-13** - "(For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth). It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated."

The greatest demonstration of God's love is in the finished work of Jesus:

- **Romans 5:8** - "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

In fact, Jacob was a trickster, and Esau seemed to be a more faithful son to his father Isaac. But Jacob eventually wrestled with the angel of the Lord until he was enlightened and his name was changed to Israel. And Esau sold his birthright for a bowl of pottage, and wept but without ever coming to repentance.

- **Hebrews 12:17** - "For ye know how afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected; for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears."

(Jacob and Esau represent spiritual types. Jacob represents the life led by the Spirit. Esau is a life ruled by the flesh.)

The two nations of their descendants, Israel and Edom, were both destroyed by the Babylonians. But God stirred up the hearts of Persian kings to promote the Jews' return to resettle and rebuild their land and cities.

In contrast, the residue of the Edomites were still suffering from their previous desolation.

Malachi 1:4-5 - "Whereas Edom saith, We are impoverished, but we will return and build the desolate places; thus saith the LORD of hosts, They shall build, but I will throw down; and they shall call them, The border of wickedness, and, The people against whom the LORD hath indignation for ever. And your eyes shall see, and ye shall say, The LORD will be magnified from the border of Israel."

Eventually the remaining Edomites, reduced in population, encroached into a small slice of Israel's former land. They were conquered by the Jews in the second century B.C. and forcibly incorporated into Judaism. Josephus says they were compelled to be circumcised. Later, the Romans chose one of them, Herod, to serve as their puppet king of Judea. But their original land remained desolate and was controlled by another people, the Nabateans. The Edomites eventually disappeared as a distinct people.

The Sins of the Priests

Malachi 1:6-7 - "A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is mine honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear? saith the LORD of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise my name. And ye say, Wherein have we despised thy name? Ye offer polluted bread upon mine altar; and ye say, Wherein have we polluted thee? In that ye say, The table of the LORD is contemptible."

This is a devastating critique. Israel's priests, who were supposed to serve and worship God in Temple ministry, called God Father and Master but actually had no fear of God and gave Him no honor. They were hypocrites.

Saying "the table of the Lord is contemptible" means that anything God had to offer them was not worth receiving. In fact, it meant they were serving for what they could get out of it.

In contrast the mission and ministry of Jesus, our great High Priest, cost Him His life. The apostles followed His lead.

Consequently, the bread these priests offered to God was polluted somehow - stale and moldy.

And it gets worse:

Malachi 1:8 - "And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? and if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith the LORD of hosts."

The animals they offered for sacrifice were lame or blind, wounded or sick - defective in some way. This was prohibited in **Leviticus 22:20-23** and **Deuteronomy 15:21**. There were about 50 different kinds of disqualifying blemishes, according to Maimonides (Hilchot Biath Hamikdash, c. 7. sect. 1).

In fact, even the Gentiles did not allow blemished animals for sacrifice.

Hirelings

Malachi 1:10 - "Who is there even among you that would shut the doors for nought? neither do ye kindle fire on mine altar for nought. I have no pleasure in you, saith the LORD of hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hand."

Guarding the doors and kindling the fires were some of the least technically difficult jobs. The priests apparently wouldn't even consider doing these simple tasks without some compensation.

Priests received a portion of the sacrifices - a shoulder or the animal's hide - to support them and their families. But their motivation should have been only love for their God and the people.

Ministers who serve only for a paycheck are what the scriptures call "hirelings."

Jesus addressed this:

- **John 10:13-14** - "The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine."

But there's another way to translate this passage.

Another translation: "O that there were one among even you who would shut the doors, that ye might not light mine altar to no purpose."

or: "who is there among you that will shut the door of the house of my sanctuary, that ye

may not kindle a fire on my altar to offer an abominable sacrifice?"

In the Temple there were three piles or rows of fire made every day upon the brazen altar; the first was a large one, on which they offered the daily sacrifice, with the rest of the offerings; the second was on the side of it, a little one, from whence they took fire in the censer to burn incense every day; the third had no other use for it but to confirm the command concerning fire; as it is said, "the fire shall ever be burning", **Leviticus 6:13**, and this fire was kindled to burn the sacrifices, the daily sacrifice, and other burnt offerings, for which they were paid out of the tithes, and other oblations. - *Gills Exposition*

If God here is calling for someone who would shut the Temple doors so no fires would be kindled and thus no more sacrifices would be offered, that would be a call for Messiah to come.

Christ, as the perfect sacrifice, fulfilled all righteousness, and put an end to the sacrifices, as this verse is calling for.

He's the one who shut the door - the veil was ripped and he "caused the sacrifice and the oblation to cease."

- **Daniel 9:27** - "And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate."

God Will Turn to the Gentiles

Here God delivers a harsh rebuke, but also an important prophecy - He would no longer receive offerings from them, but would instead turn to the Gentiles.

Malachi 1:11 - "For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the LORD of hosts."

The Jewish translation is "my name IS great among the Gentiles" - i.e. it's all present tense. They say it refers to the Torah scholars scattered in all the Gentile nations offering up prayers.

More probably Malachi was seeing the new era of the days of Messiah. This is indeed what is happening right now as we, Gentiles, have been grafted into Israel and offer prayers as incense to the true God - all of us as part of a royal priesthood.

Malachi 1:12 - "But ye have profaned it, in that ye say, The table of the LORD is polluted; and the fruit thereof, even his meat, is contemptible."

The "table of the Lord" pictures the Peace Offering, and by extension the *afikomen* of communion, the Lord's Supper. From that table, the priest and his family, the offerer and his family and God Himself all ate and received sustenance from the same thing (**Leviticus 7:11-18**). But what was supposed to be a joyous feast they found to be contemptible.

Before a sacrifice, the priest would lay his hand on the animal's head, to identify with it and agreeing that he deserved death as well as the one who brought the offering, and that the blood of the animal splashed on the altar represented an exchange of the priest's life for the unblemished life of Christ, who was sacrificed once and for all for us. The best fatty part of the animal was given to God to be burned on the altar.

To find this ritual contemptible means that the priest is left with a spiritually unsatisfied and hallow soul, without hope, without fellowship and of no use to God or his people. It's a horrible place to find yourself in. Your life and work is pointless drudgery.

Malachi 1:13 - "Ye said also, Behold, what a weariness is it! and ye have snuffed at it, saith the LORD of hosts; and ye brought that which was torn, and the lame, and the sick; thus ye brought an offering: should I accept this of your hand? saith the LORD."

He is describing cast off and worthless offerings. In contrast, King David said "nor will I offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God with that which costs me nothing" (**2 Samuel 24:24**).

Not just the priests were guilty, but the people also would present damaged animals to the priests to sacrifice. The priests allowed and validated their actions.

Malachi 1:14 - "But cursed be the deceiver, which hath in his flock a male, and voweth, and sacrificeth unto the Lord a corrupt thing: for I am a great King, saith the LORD of hosts, and my name is dreadful among the heathen."

Even the heathen Gentiles give honor to God, as we saw in the decrees of the Persian kings. But God said He was receiving no honor from the priests or even from the people of Israel!

God's turn toward the Gentiles was prophesied in many places:

- **Zechariah 14:16** - "And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles."

- **Zephaniah 2:11** - "The Lord will be terrible unto them: for he will famish all the gods of the earth; and men shall worship him, every one from his place, even all the isles of the heathen."

- **Matthew 8:11-12** - "Many shall come from the East and West, and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, and the children of the

kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness."

So it was understood by the early church :

Justin Martyr, circa 133 A.D. - "God has, therefore, beforehand declared, that all who through this name offer those sacrifices, which Jesus, who is the Christ, commanded to be offered, that is to say, in the eucharist of the bread and of the cup, which are offered in every part of the world by us Christians, are well-pleasing to Him. But those sacrifices, which are offered by you and through those priests of yours, He wholly rejects, saying, "And I will not accept your offerings at your hands. For from the rising of the sun even to the going down of the same, My Name is glorified among the Gentiles; but ye profane it."

Summary: As believers we are all priests and living stones in the new Temple of His Body. When we gather together we bring to the Lord's table spiritual milk and meat - words of insight, exhortation, wisdom and knowledge along with spiritual songs, prophecy and teachings to edify one another.

In light of Malachi's warning, we should make sure what we bring to the table has cost us something, some suffering or at least a moment of self-scrutiny and repentance. It should represent the best of who we are, as a transparent conduit for the Spirit, not borrowed words from someone else or random opinions about the world and its ways.

- **1 John 4:5** - "They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them."

We can all speak, but if I'm just talking to hear myself talk, that becomes a blemished sacrifice.

Relying on worldly solutions to problems instead of leaning on God or promoting our political opinions becomes moldy bread on the Lord's table.

Constantly rehashing a past experience can end up as leftover worm-eaten manna.

This might mean we have fewer things to say, but hopefully more meaningful insights.

From another perspective, we are each said to be living sacrifices:

- **Romans 12:1** - "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

It's not up to us to change ourselves to try to get rid of our own perceived blemishes. Our new identity in Christ is perfect and unblemished. We surrender our lives into His hands as He transforms us by the renewing of our minds.

- **Malachi 1:11** - "...in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering; for my name shall be great among the heathen." This is being fulfilled by Christ in us now.